

Locations where fossils have been found

Palaeolagus

Common Name:
Ancient rabbit

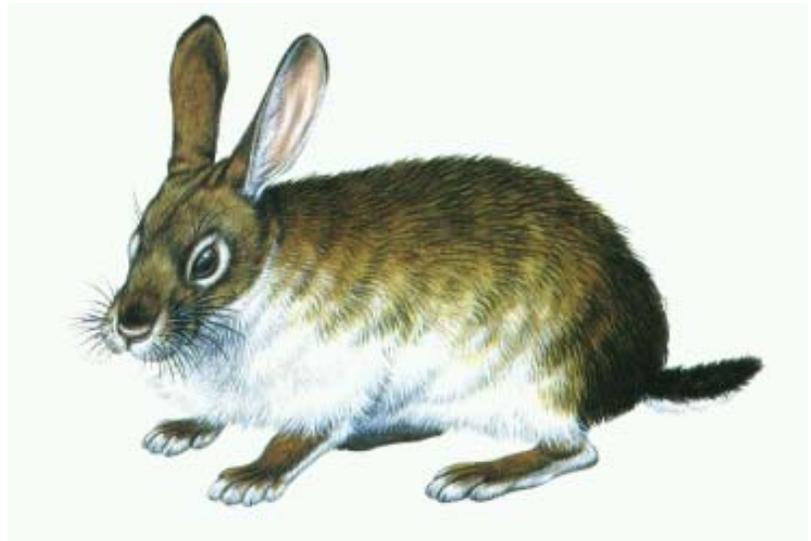
Classification:
Class: Mammalia
Order: Lagomorpha
Family: Leporidae



Skull of the rabbit, *Palaeolagus*. Oligocene Brule Formation. Stark County. 30 mm long. North Dakota State Fossil Collection.

Description:

Palaeolagus is in the Order Lagomorpha which includes the pikas, rabbits, and hares. Because of their small size and continually growing, gnawing teeth, they were much like rodents except lagomorphs have two pairs of gnawing teeth (incisors), one immediately behind the other, in the upper jaws compared to a single pair in rodents. The chewing action is also different between the two groups, in lagomorphs the jaws work sideways and in rodents the jaws work backward and forward. *Palaeolagus* was similar in appearance to the modern rabbit except its hind legs were proportionally shorter which suggests that they were more adapted for scampering, similar to a ground squirrel, than hopping. *Palaeolagus* grew to lengths of about 10 inches. They were common vegetarian inhabitants of the North Dakota savanna 30 million years ago.



Palaeolagus. Painting courtesy of Simon and Schuster Publishing Company.